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ABSTRACT

The publications of the Marvel Comics Group warrant serious consideration as a legitimate narrative enterprise. While it is obvious that these comic books can be used in the classroom as a source of reading material, it is not so obvious that these comic books, with great economy, simplicity, and narrative density, can be used to further introduce novice readers to the techniques found in narrative and to the terms employed in the study and discussion of a narrative. The output of the Marvel Comics Group in particular is literate, is both narratively and philosophically sophisticated, and is ethically and morally responsible. Some of the narrative techniques found in the stories, such as the Spider-Man episodes, include foreshadowing, a dramatic fiction narrator, flashback, irony, symbolism, metaphor, Biblical and historical allusions, and mythological allusions. (MKM)

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The Use of Comics as an Approach to Introducing the Techniques and Terms of Narrative to Novice Readers

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by

Donald Palumbo

The publications of the Marvel Comics Group, which number nearly 16 million magazines per month, warrant serious consideration as a legitimate narrative enterprise. While it is easy to imagine without actually examining these more sophisticated comics too closely that they encourage and, in fact, teach reading--as the graphics themselves prompt the reader to explore the story more closely by inviting him to attend also to the narration and dialogue at the same time that they, while in themselves incomprehensible, visually reinforce the meaning of these story elements--it is not so obvious that these comic books, with greater economy, clarity, and ease of comprehension, due to their relative simplicity and narrative density, than the great masterpieces of literature will yield, can be used further to introduce novice (and not so novice) readers to the techniques found in narrative and to the terms employed in the study and discussion of narrative. The output of the Marvel Comics Group in particular is literate, is both narratively and philosophically sophisticated, and is ethically and morally responsible;

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moreover, Marvel Comics invariably demonstrate with intelligence and variety such concepts as synopsis, dramatic fiction, exposition, flashback, foreshadowing, plot structure, climax, resolution, sub-plot, double, foil, characterization, irony, symbolism, allegory, metaphor, pathetic fallacy, personification, and allusion as they aid in building vocabulary and increase reading comprehension.

The plot in a Marvel Comic is often surprisingly complex, and a single story-line will sometimes develop over the space of a dozen or more issues. In general, the longer plots--due also to their reliance on heroes and villains who possess unique natural abilities and who frequently wield artifacts whose properties can most accurately be described as magical--are reminiscent of those of lengthly fifteenth and sixteenth century verse romances. As an accommodation to the fact that these intricate, if not cumbersome, tales progress at the rate of only one episode a month, the people behind Marvel make frequent use of synopses to help their readers remember what is happening, and the writers often allude to their straightforward use of synopsis. A back issue of Amazing Spider-Man, for example, begins with the Spider-Man telling himself, "The Kingpin is hiding somewhere in this area! And with my spider sense, it won't take me long to find him! I can't let him get away with stealing that priceless tablet from the campus' exhibition hall! . . . expecially since Mr. Robinson's son, Randy, and the other protest leaders . . . are being booked on charges of aiding the Kingpin in his theft! Not to mention the fact that the tablet is so priceless that fatso can sell it to any nation he chooses!" Here a footnote intrudes to point out, "How's that for a sneaky way to summarize our last ish?--Subtle Stan."[1]

A recent issue of the Fantastic Four, the ninth episode in a story whose conclusion is not yet in sight, begins with a much more elaborate synopsis provided by a handy character called the Watcher, whose sole occupation is to observe events on earth from his vantage point on the moon. The Watcher is really a dramatic fiction, like the "Publisher-

I AM CALLED -- THE WATCHER! IT HAS BEEN MY RACE'S TASK TO OBSERVE THE LIVES OF ALL CREATURES WHO DWELL WITHIN OUR EXPANDING UNIVERSE. THUS, HEAR ME NOW, CITIZENS OF EARTH -- TONIGHT YOUR TROUBLED WORLD SHALL BECOME A WAR-TORN BACKDROP TO AN ALREADY PRE-DESTINED STRUGGLE!
THE BATTLE OF THE TITANS!
FOR EVERY WAR THERE MUST BE OPPOSING FORCES! WITNESS THE WORLD-DOMINATING POWER OF GALACTUS, LED BY HIS HERALD, HE WHO IS KNOWN AS TERRAX THE TAMER!
WITNESS, TOO, THE AWESOME PLANET-SHAKING ENERGY THAT IS POSSESSED BY THE BEING CALLED ONLY -- THE SPHINX!
A MARV WOLFMAN/JOHN BYRNE JOE SINNOTT production
COSTANZA, letters JIM SHOOTER, GAFFORD, colors consulting ed.
EG 533

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Fantastic Four 212 (1979), p. 1

LONG AGO IT WAS PREDESTINED THAT THESE THREE MIGHTY BEINGS BE DRAWN INTO CONFLICT, WHILE I, WHO CAN DO NO MORE THAN OBSERVE, MUST SIMPLY NOTE ALL THAT TRANSPIRES IN MY COSMIC LOG OF KNOWLEDGE!
TO FULLY COMPREHEND ALL THAT SHALL OCCUR, ONE MUST FIRST LEARN WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED...
FOR EARTH, THIS BATTLE BEGAN IN THE RECESSES OF THE BAXTER BUILDING WHERE SCIENTIST REED RICHARDS STRUGGLED TO LEARN THE ORIGIN OF A STRANGE ION RAY.
WHAT IN THE WORLD? A GIRL-- APPEARING IN MY BEAM!
<PLEASE!- HELP ME BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!>
"A MOMENT MORE, AND THE REASON FOR THE GIRL'S CONSTERNATION BECAME QUITE EVIDENT!"
IT'S A SKRULL CREEPO! HE'S AFTER THAT SPACE GAL!
WE'VE GOT TO STOP HIM, BEN!
WHADDA YA THINK I'M DOIN'? DANCIN' WITH MORK FROM ORK?
"WITH THIS STRANGE SKRULL DEFEATED, THE ALIEN GIRL, PRINCESS ADORA, SUZERAIN OF THE PLANET XANDAR, CONVINCED THE FANTASTIC FOUR TO AID IN HER PLANET'S WAR AGAINST THE SKRULLS.
"THE THREE VALIANT TEAM MEMBERS HAD JOINED HER SOON FOUND THEMSELVES CAPTURED BY THE SAVAGE SKRULLS AND FORCED TO PARTAKE IN A TRIAL WHICH MOCKED TRUE JUSTICE.
YOU HAVE BEEN FOUND GUILTY OF CONSPIRING AGAINST THE SKRULL EMPIRE!
YOUR PUNISHMENT SHALL BE DEATH BY RAPID AGING!
IN THREE OF YOUR EARTH DAYS, YOU SHALL PERISH OF OLD AGE!

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Fantastic Four 212 (1979), pp. 2-3, top

"WITH THE AID OF ANOTHER SUPER HERO GROUP KNOWN AS THE NEW CHAMPIONS, THE FANTASTIC FOUR ESCAPED THE SKRULL HOMEWORLD AND RETURNED TO XANDAR ONLY TO FIND THEIR FOURTH MEMBER WAITING FOR THEM...
JOHNNY! YOU MADE IT!
YEAH, SIS, IT WAS GETTING A BIT LONELY HANGING AROUND THE BAXTER BUILDING.
"BUT THE JOY OF REUNION COULD NOT LIGHTEN THE TRAGEDY THAT WAS SOON TO BEFALL THEM ALL!
"FROM ABOARD THE CHAMPIONS' STAR-SHIP CAME THE SPHINX, WHOSE SOLE DESIRE WAS TO TAP THE POWER OF XANDAR'S LEGENDARY LIVING COMPUTERS!
"AND WITH THE TERRIBLE KNOWLEDGE HE GAINED, HE SUMMONED TO HIMSELF THE POWERS OF THE UNIVERSE!
"DRIVEN MAD WITH SUCH POWER, THE SPHINX DECIDED ON A DEADLY ACTION: HE WOULD RETURN TO THE PLANET OF HIS BIRTH -- AND THEN HE WOULD DESTROY IT!
"THEIR POWER DIMINISHED BY THEIR EVER-INCREASING AGING, THE FANTASTIC FOUR KNEW THERE WAS ONLY ONE BEING CAPABLE OF ENGAGING THE SINISTER SPHINX IN BATTLE:
"GALACTUS, DEVOURER OF WORLDS!
HELP US DEFEAT THE SPHINX AND I'LL RELINQUISH THE VOW I MADE YOU TAKE NEVER TO ATTACK THE EARTH ANEW!
"THE EARTHLING'S SHOCKING REQUEST STARTLED EVEN ME, YET ONCE I PIERCED HIS UNCONSCIOUS MIND I UNDERSTOOD HIS PLAN OF ACTION.
AND SO, NOW THE EARTH STANDS DEFENSELESS AGAINST TWIN MENACES--
WILL IT SURVIVE? WILL IT PERISH AS COUNTLESS WORLDS HAVE PERISHED BEFORE? THAT I DO NOT NOW KNOW...
LIKE YOU, I MUST SIMPLY WAIT AND OBSERVE THE EVENTS AS THEY OCCUR.
FOR, AM I NOT-- THE WATCHER?

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Fantastic Four 212 (1979), pp. 2-3, bottom

Editor" of Gulliver's Travels, for instance, whose function here is to orient the reader. He habitually undertakes this same role of dramatic fiction to provide the flashbacks and expositions in each issue of What If, a magazine whose stories hypothesize what would have happened in alternate "realities" had critical occurrences in the Marvel Comics universe transpired differently. And in the latest and only Micronauts Annual, a character known as "the Enigmatic Time Traveler" is also used as a dramatic fiction to introduce a trio of related stories that occur simultaneously on the day prior to the inception of the Micronauts series.[2]

These three stories are thus actually flashbacks, and more obviously identified flashbacks are customarily employed to fill the reader in on long forgotten or never revealed wrinkles in an ongoing plot. For example, in the issue of Fantastic Four that begins with the Watcher's synopsis, there is both a brief flashback that details what had finally happened to an auxillary, extra-terrestrial villain whom the heroes had defeated early in the story and a lengthly flashback that reveals the history of the Immortal Sphinx, the story's primary villain, from his mortal days when he had been the Chief Wizard of Ramses II--and had been discredited and exiled when his conjured snake had been swallowed by that serpent conjured by Moses.[3]

Marvel's writers employ foreshadowing even more frequently and more adeptly than they make use of flashbacks. The Watcher emphasizes that the conflict between The Sphinx and the entity the Fantastic Four had recruited to combat him, Galactus, is "predestined," and, in the flashback that recounts his history, a pivotal event is the early revelation of

the Sphinx's eventual destiny, a revelation from which he recoils in horror and which he sees in the blank "what was once a face" of an oracle. Although we do not at this point learn what his destiny is, the Sphinx, who had been granted the curse of everlasting life by the mystic Ka Stone and had specifically been seeking the means of his own death ever since his first appearance in Marvel Comics, complains bitterly of both his immortality and destiny throughout this story--and, in fact, in every Marvel plot in which he had appeared to that time. Finally, he loses his battle with Galactus in the current issue of Fantastic Four, and, as the oracle reappears on the desert sands of Egypt, where the battle had occurred, to remind the Sphinx that the moment of his long-foretold destiny is now at hand, Galactus tells him, "Sphinx! You who have disdained your immortality . . . you who have sought to end your eternal life--you yearn for a peaceful death! But you have not earned such a fate! Behold, Sphinx--I have returned you to the very moment before you discovered the mystic Ka Stone! Now you shall be forced to retrace all your steps! You shall once more discover the stone. Once more you shall become immortal. Once more you shall live for five thousand torturous years . . . and then--then you shall be forced to repeat that torture . . . time and time again--throughout all eternity! Thus the creature who hates his immortal life must now know he can never hope to die." And at this climactic point another incident, one that is clearly to foreshadow the destiny of Galactus and to be resolved sometime in the future, occurs: the oracle offers to reveal Galactus' future to him, but Galactus responds, "My destiny . . . my fate . . . is already sealed. I do not need you to show it to me."[4]

ORACLE! HAVE YOU COME HERE TO MOCK ME AS YOU HAVE DONE IN THE PAST?
I HAVE NEVER MOCKED YOU, ANCIENT ONE... YOU HAVE MERELY GAZED INTO WHAT WAS ONCE MY FACE--
--AND YOU HAVE SEEN YOUR FUTURE DESTINY REFLECTED!
I HAVE SAID NOTHING... I MERELY MIRRORED YOUR SOUL... I SIMPLY SHOW YOU YOUR FATE!
BUT MY FATE... MY DESTINY... IS TOO HORRIBLE!
SPHINX... YOU SHOULD KNOW BY NOW... NO MAN ESCAPES HIS FATE.
WHAT IS WRITTEN MUST COME TO PASS!
ENOUGH! GALACTUS IS NOT INTERESTED IN THIS DIALOGUE!
GALACTUS MUST DO WHAT GALACTUS MUST DO...
SPHINX! YOU WHO HAVE DISDAINED YOUR IMMORTALITY... YOU WHO HAVE SOUGHT TO END YOUR ETERNAL LIFE--
--YOU YEARN FOR A PEACEFUL DEATH! BUT YOU HAVE NOT EARNED SUCH A FATE!
BEHOLD, SPHINX-- I HAVE RETURNED YOU TO THE VERY MOMENT BEFORE YOU DISCOVERED THE MYSTIC KA STONE!
NOW YOU SHALL BE FORCED TO RETRACE ALL YOUR STEPS!
YOU SHALL ONCE MORE DISCOVER THE STONE. ONCE MORE YOU SHALL BECOME IMMORTAL. ONCE MORE YOU SHALL LIVE FOR FIVE THOUSAND TORTUROUS YEARS...
AND THEN--THEN YOU SHALL BE FORCED TO REASSAT THAT TORTURE ...TIME AND TIME AGAIN-- THROUGHOUT ALL ETERNITY!
THUS THE CREATURE WHO HATES HIS IMMORTAL LIFE MUST NOW KNOW HE CAN NEVER HOPE TO DIE!
NO!

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Fantastic Four 213 (1979), p. 22

A more interesting and engaging and far more involuted use is made of prophecy as foreshadowing in recent issues of Marvel Team-Up. Dr. Strange, master of the mystic arts, receives a deck of tarot cards, "an ancient deck, heavily charged with power," in the mail and feels compelled by them to lay out a prophecy. The intricacies of an extremely complex plot lead Strange, in his effort to discover the tarot deck's origin, to New Orleans, where he encounters Marie LeVeau, "the Witch-Queen

THE TAROT: TEN CARDS, PULLED FROM A DECK OF SEVENTY-EIGHT, LAID OUT IN A CELTIC GRAND CROSS.
IN THE HANDS OF A CHARLATAN, THEY'RE MERELY CARDS, PIECES OF PAINTED PLASTIC. BUT IN THE HANDS OF ONE WHO KNOWS AND RESPECTS THE FORCES BEHIND THEM, THEY CAN BE WINDOWS ON THE FUTURE, GATEWAYS TO A MAN'S SOUL.
SPIDEY KNOWS LITTLE OF THE TAROT AND CARES LESS--AS HE SWINGS ACROSS WASHINGTON SQUARE, INTENT ON TAKING THIS SATURDAY NIGHT OFF AND ENJOYING HIMSELF, FOR ONCE. TO HIM, THE TAROT IS A PARLOR GAME, AND IF THE CARDS' PREDICTIONS ARE ACCURATE, IT'S COINCIDENCE--NO MORE, NO LESS.
BUT THAT'S ALL RIGHT, BECAUSE FOR THE MOMENT, THIS LAYOUT DOESN'T CONCERN HIM.

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Marvel Team-Up 76 (1978), p. 1

of New Orleans," who greets him with the words, "Enter freely, and of your own will." Dr. Strange--recognizing more foreshadowing as well as an allusion when he hears it--muses, "A woman--greeting me with the words Dracula used to welcome Jonathan Harker. Another warning--?!" Ar[illegible] then notices that the arrangement of tarot cards Marie LeVeau had just cast on the table before her is "the same layout I threw back in New York." Much later, when Strange at one point thinks his adventure is over and concludes that he is in Marie's debt, the witch-queen replies, "The debt is already paid, mage. You will know the manner of its coinage soon enough. Heed the Tarot, my friend. Its prophecy is not yet done." It takes six issues of Marvel Team-Up, in fact, to fully work out the prophecy inherent in the initial tarot layout; and in this time, Spider-Man seeks clues with which to unravel the ensuing mysteries by taking the remembered layout to a fortune teller--who interprets it at length--several issues prior to the final denouement. Similar use of prophecy as foreshadowing is the central interest in a recent Defenders plot. And a recent Avengers story, which ran ten issues and is far too intricate to do justice to here, manages in one brief but dynamic scene in the second episode to foreshadow both the two crucial plot twists in the ninth episode climax and the three elements of the story's tenth episode resolution.[5]

I would be surprised to find a single issue of the 5,000 or more Marvel Comics published in the last 18 years that did not contain some easily perceived irony. In the Fantastic Four plot already discussed in terms of its use of synopsis and foreshadowing, it is an incidental

"THE FIRST CARD, JUSTICE, MEANS A BALANCE HAS BEEN RESTORED. THE MAGICIAN -- THE FOUNDATION OF THE MATTER AT HAND -- HAS OVERCOME THE HIEROPHANT, INVERTED. BUT CROSSING JUSTICE IS THE 3 OF SWORDS; AS ONE BALANCE IS RESTORED, ANOTHER IS UPSET. SOMEONE YOUR FRIEND LOVES IS THREATENED.
"AHEAD HE FACES THE 10 OF SWORDS -- TERRIBLE DANGER -- BUT HE DOESN'T FACE IT ALONE. THE 3 OF CUPS MEANS HE WILL HAVE STALWART COMPANIONS AT HIS SIDE.
THE TOWER
ACE OF CUPS
THE HIEROPHANT
JUSTICE
THE MAGICIAN
"HIS WORST FEARS ARE REVEALED ON THE SCROLL OF THE HIGH PRIESTESS, INVERTED -- THAT HIS SACRIFICES WILL ALL BE IN VAIN. HIS ENVIRONMENT IS THE MOON -- LOVING MOTHER, DREAD DESTROYER, AND ALSO THE REALM OF ILLUSION HE HOPES FOR THE ACE OF CUPS -- THE GRAIL OF VICTORY, THE CHALICE OF LOVE.
THE MOON
THE HIGH PRIESTESS
"BUT THE FINAL OUTCOME IS THE SHATTERED TOWER -- DEFEAT SNATCHED FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY. COMPLETE OBLITERATION, THE DEATH AND FELL DAMNATION OF HIS SOUL."
WHOEVER YOUR FRIEND IS, I PITY HIM.

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but delicious irony that the end result of the Sphinx's already paradoxical five thousand year quest for death should be that he is doomed to certain, and a particularly Sisyphean, eternal life. And the story-line in the intricately foreshadowed Avengers plot abounds with both trivial and pivotal ironies. The magazines in which Spider-Man appears also team with verbal and dramatic ironies of a superficial nature. To take one trivial example from among thousands, while attending a taping of Saturday Night Live as a member of the audience, Peter Parker, Spider-Man's secret civilian persona, is captured on the studio monitor as the caption "super-hero in his spare time!" flashes beneath his video image.

HE MOVES AS FAST AS HE CAN DOWN THE CROWDED AISLE, UNAWARE OF THE BOOM CAMERA RISING TOWARDS HIM. UNTIL...
SUPER-HERO IN HIS SPARE TIME!
THAT MONITOR-- IT'S ME!
OH, NO!

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Marvel Team-Up 74 (1978), p. 10

On another occasion, J. Jonah Jameson, Peter Parker's employer and publisher of The Daily Bugle, ironically undercuts with his memory of it (provided in a flashback) his verbal explanation of an encounter with a man his paper has pilloried. In the flashback panels Jameson remembers blowing cigar smoke in his victim's face while saying, "Boy, my business is selling newspapers. If a crusade will sell a newspaper--then J. Jonah Jameson will have a crusade." Yet he concurrently tells Spider-Man, "I explained it was a matter of high moral principle."[6]

"OF COURSE, THE GRIZZLY--A BUFFOON NAMED MAXWELL MARKHAM--DIDN'T QUITE SEE IT THAT WAY...
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO DO THAT.
IT WASN'T YOUR BUSINESS, JAMESON--
BOY, MY BUSINESS IS SELLING NEWSPAPERS.
IF A CRUSADE WILL SELL A NEWSPAPER--
--THEN J. JONAH JAMESON WILL HAVE A CRUSADE.
"I EXPLAINED IT WAS A MATTER OF HIGH MORAL PRINCIPLE--"

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Amazing Spider-Man 140 (1974), p. 16

And Spider-Man himself is the victim of more significant, thematic and structural ironies. Invariably rooted in his dual identity, these ironic twists intrude in his relationships with nearly everyone close to him. Both of the two most important women in his life, Betty Bryant and Gwen Stacy, love Peter and hate Spider-Man; and Peter's Aunt May, his only living relative, dotes on her nephew while she too loathes and fears his alter-ego. She feels Spider-Man is a "menace to society," faints from shock at the sight of him, and once knocks him unconscious with a vase as he tries to infiltrate the hideout of Doctor Octopus, Spider-Man's primary arch-nemisis, who has befriended Aunt May, employs her as his housekeeper and contented companion, and later almost succeeds in marrying her. And Peter's employer, J. Jonah Jameson, is also Spider-Man's most effectively harmful enemy, although Spider-Man has saved Jameson's life over a dozen times--often from super-powered villains whom Jameson himself had had created for the sole purpose of destroying Spider-Man.[7]

Yet, the seminal irony of the Spider-Man story lies in the incident that prompts him to dedicate his life to fighting crime as a super-hero, his Uncle Ben's death. On gaining his powers from the accidental bite of a radioactive spider while attending a scientific demonstration, high school student Peter Parker's first impulse is to use his new abilities to gain wealth and fame. As he arrives at the studio where he is to appear on a TV variety show, Peter, in his Spider-Man costume and feeling that he has better things to do, refuses to assist a policeman in apprehending an escaping thief, who runs right by him. When he returns

EEEEEEK!
IT'S SPIDER-MAN! HE BROKE IN HERE!
BUT DON'T WORRY... I'LL SAVE YOU FROM HIM!
OHHH..!
THE SHOCK... IT'S TOO MUCH FOR HER!
BUT, THE ARCH-VILLAIN'S WORDS FALL UPON DEAF EARS AS THE HEARTSICK YOUTH CRIES OUT...
IT WAS SPIDER-MAN WHO SCARED HER... I'M THE ONE SHE FEARS!
I TRIED TO SPARE HER THIS... BUT NOW-- BECAUSE OF ME... SHE'S--SHE'S...!
IT'S ALL RIGHT, AUNT MAY! YOU'RE SAFE! YOU'VE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM SPIDER-MAN!
LOOK-- I'LL PROVE IT! JUST OPEN YOUR EYES..! JUST WAKE UP!

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Amazing Spider-Man 54 (1967), pp. 18 & 19

FORGET IT, WALL-CRAWLER! AFTER ALL, THAT EERIE SIXTH-SENSE OF YOURS REACTS ONLY TO THE NEARNESS OF SWORN FOEMEN... OF HIDDEN MENACE!
WHY SHOULD IT HAVE SOUNDED THE CLARION CALL OF DEADLY DANGER--WHEN THE ONE WHO HAS STRUCK YOU DOWN--
--IS NONE OTHER THAN AUNT MAY HERSELF--!
DOCTOR OCTAVIUS! DOCTOR OCTAVIUS, COME QUICKLY!
I--I THINK I JUST KILLED THAT HUMAN MONSTER--SPIDER-MAN!

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DOC OCK IS MARRYING AUNT MAY!
GOT THE PICTURE, FRANTIC ONES? WE THOUGHT SO. AND JUST IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T GOTTEN THE IDEA--TAKE A LOOK AT THE TITLE OF OUR NEXT FABULOUS INSTALLMENT:
MY UNCLE / MY ENEMY!
SEE YA NEXT MONTH, FUN-LOVERS!

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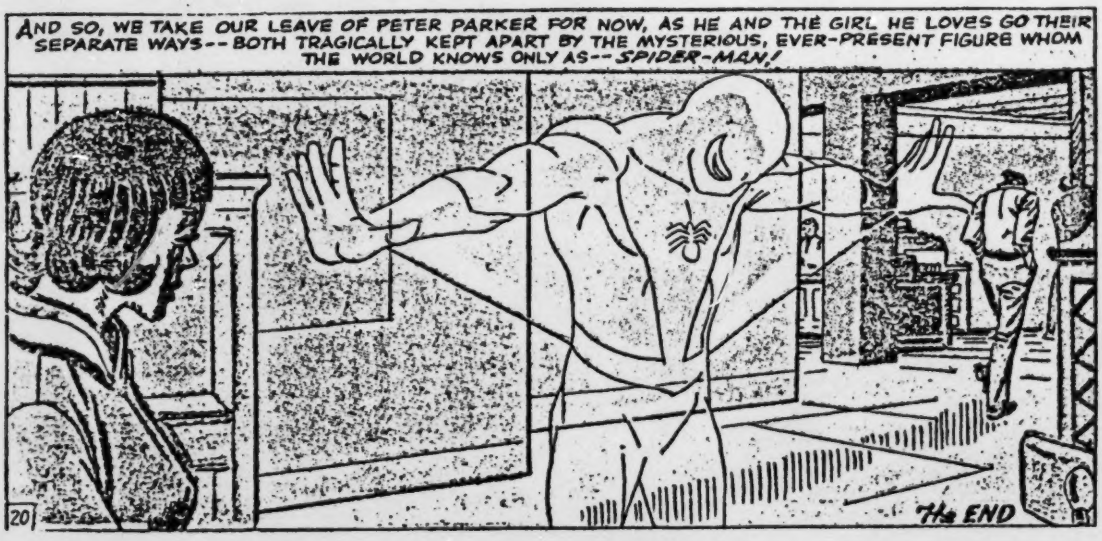
Amazing Spider-Man 114 (1972), p. 29, & 130 (1973), p. 31

home from the studio late that evening, Peter learns that a burglar had broken into his house in his absence and had fatally shot his Uncle Ben. In revenge, after changing back to Spider-Man, he trails the burglar to a warehouse and easily overpowers him, only to discover that the burglar is the same thief he had earlier that evening allowed to escape. Consumed by guilt, Peter vows, "I'll never again refuse to use my spider-power whenever it can help the cause of justice. I'll spend the rest of my life--making up for the death of Uncle Ben."[8]

Six comic-book-time years after his uncle's murder, Spider-Man revisits Uncle Ben's grave to leave there the microscope his uncle had given him as a gift on the day of his death. In placing the instrument before the headstone, Spider-Man thinks, "I--I brought you this, Uncle Ben! For years I've cherished it! It symbolizes everything you ever meant to me--your belief in Peter Parker. It's the only fitting memorial for who you were--my father, teacher . . . friend! You always built me up where others tore me down! I'm returning your gift to you, Uncle Ben! It's the only way I can express my gratitude!" Marvel Comics frequently employ symbolism; and, as in this instance, the narrative itself sometimes calls attention to its use. As another example, Shang-Chi, in a recent Marvel Team-Up, notes in reference to Nick Fury, "I have come to aid a man whose very name symbolizes the violence that makes up his life's work." And graphic as well as narrative symbolism is often employed in these comics. Extremely similar panels depicting Spider-Man symbolically "coming between" Peter and both his lovers, Betty Bryant and Gwen Stacy, occur nearly 100 issues apart in Amazing Spider-Man 30 and 122. And a


AND SO, WE TAKE OUR LEAVE OF PETER PARKER FOR NOW, AS HE AND THE GIRL HE LOVES GO THEIR SEPARATE WAYS-- BOTH TRAGICALLY KEPT APART BY THE MYSTERIOUS, EVER-PRESENT FIGURE WHOM THE WORLD KNOWS ONLY AS-- SPIDER-MAN!
20
The END

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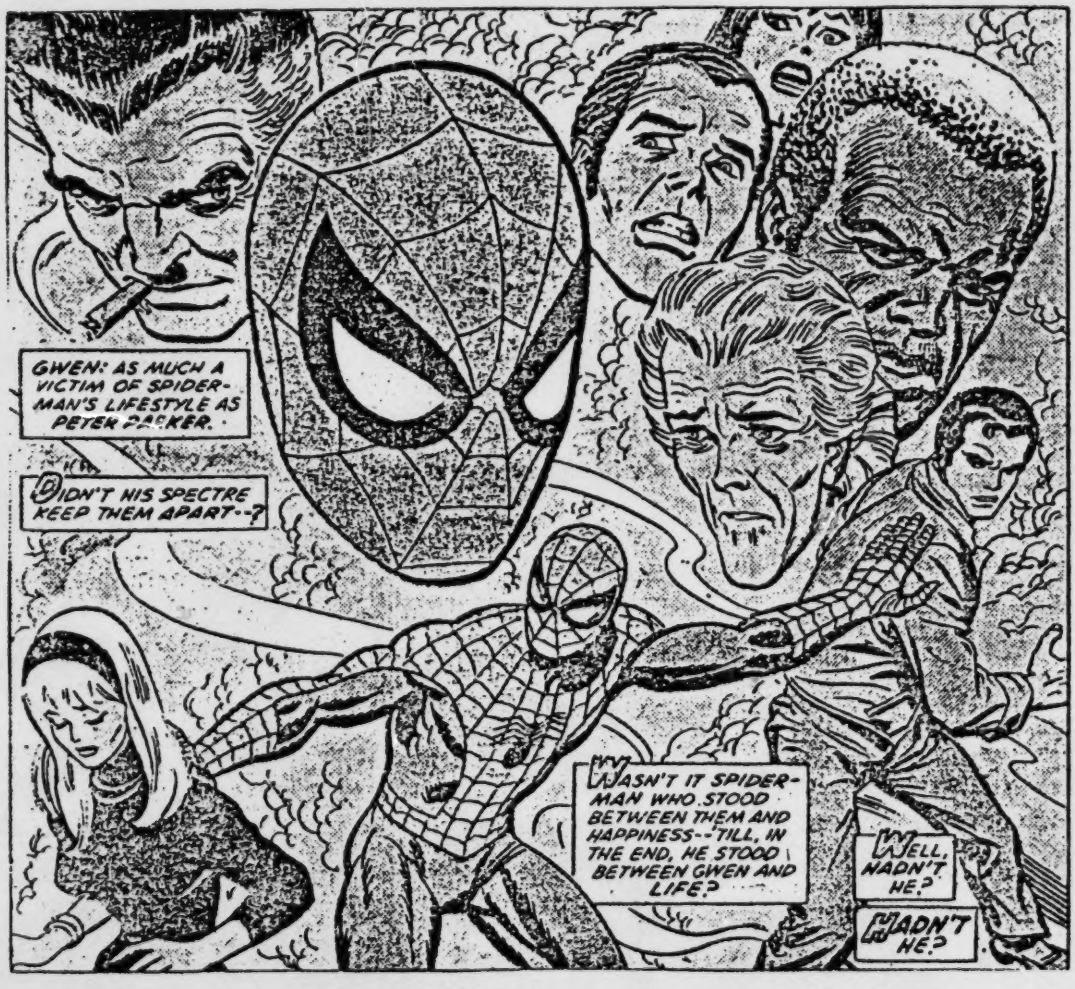
GWEN: AS MUCH A VICTIM OF SPIDER-MAN'S LIFESTYLE AS PETER PARKER.
DIDN'T HIS SPECTRE KEEP THEM APART--?
WASN'T IT SPIDER-MAN WHO STOOD BETWEEN THEM AND HAPPINESS--TILL, IN THE END, HE STOOD BETWEEN GWEN AND LIFE?
WELL, HADN'T HE?
HADN'T HE?

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Amazing Spider-Man 30 (1965), p. 20, & 122 (1973), p. 10

more subtle graphic symbolism, perhaps a way of slyly circumventing the comics code, enhances Peter's subsequently budding romance with Mary Jane Watson. For instance, as Peter and M. J. enter Peter's apartment building, apparently to get to know one another better, they pass another couple whose dogs are sniffing around each other out on the sidewalk. And when they reach Peter's door, M. J. takes Peter's key from his hand and insists on inserting it in the lock herself.[9]

OH, IT'S A COMPLIMENT, ALL RIGHT. TAKE IT FROM ME, YOU'RE PRETTY OKAY.
EXCEPT FOR YOUR SENSE OF MUSIC. UGH.
TELL ME MORE, MS. WATSON.
I LOVE FLATTERY.
FRANKLY, I REALLY DOUBT HE'LL BE IN.
IN THAT CASE, PUSSYCAT--
--LET ME DO THE DOOR UNLOCKING SCHTICK.

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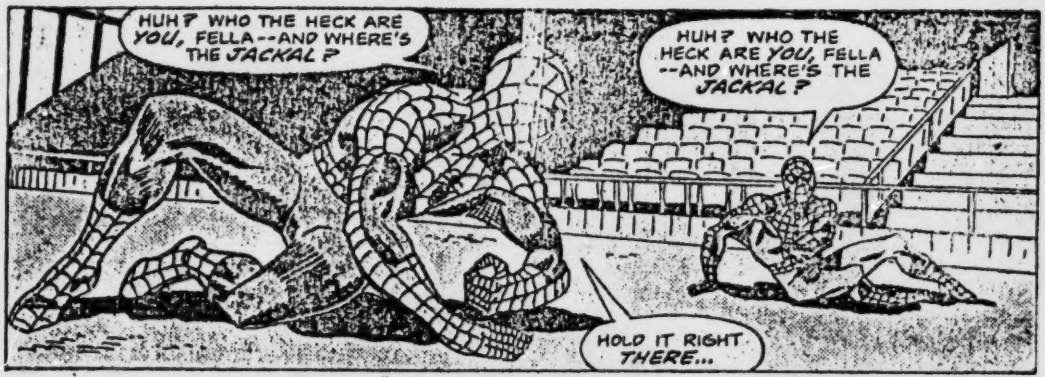
Amazing Spider-Man 136 (1974), pp. 2 & 3

Spider-Man is both a bifurcated personality, in the distinct split between his super-hero and civilian identities, and a social outcast, one who is different from the rest of humanity, in both of them. And both these traits are given strikingly graphic objective correlatives. Once Spider-Man is literally forced to fight himself in a battle to the death when he confronts an identical clone that had been created from Peter Parker's cells by one of his former biology professors turned bad.

As Spider-Man and his exact replica struggle, one or another of them, aware that the battle is symbolic of a long-standing identity crisis, notes, "Listen, we've got to stop this! I mean, what we're doing is absurd! All my life, I've had trouble knowing myself--always wondering who--or what--Spider-Man really is! I've been fighting myself ever since the day I first became Spider-Man--and now I realize if I don't declare peace--this self-war will never end!" Meanwhile, the villain gloats, "They battle--consumed by the greatest identity crisis of all time." And just as his dualism and identity crisis is graphically externalized in his battle with the clone, so too is the problematical nature of Spider-Man's humanity and his alienation in general physically manifested in the ironic results he obtains from having taken a "potion" he hopes will remove his powers: rather than shed his spider-powers, in the troubled sleep that follows his taking the potion, he grows two additional sets of arms to "become more like a spider--than ever." As he points out to himself, "You've become a character in a tale by Kafka." In an acknowledged existentialist anti-hero such as Gregor Samsa, in fact, the use of such a non-human metaphor as occurs when a character is compared to--or becomes--a dung beetle or a "human spider" also symbolically signifies both an internal divorce from the self, that part of the self that is human, and an external separation from the rest of humanity, from human society. Moreover, as a social outcast, Spider-Man is presented by his creators as somewhat of a Christ-symbol. While he grows his two new sets of arms, he endures a delirious, fever-dream in which the ghost of a former, deceased friend tells him, "There have been others--


HUH? WHO THE HECK ARE YOU, FELLA--AND WHERE'S THE JACKAL?
HUH? WHO THE HECK ARE YOU, FELLA --AND WHERE'S THE JACKAL?
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE...

...I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE GAG IS, BUT I'M NOT LAUGHING!
NEITHER AM I, HANDSOME.
EITHER YOU TELL ME WHERE THE JACKAL IS HIDING, AND WHAT HE'S DONE WITH GWEN AND NED LEEDS, OR I'LL--

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Amazing Spider-Man 149 (1975), pp. 18, 22, & 23

BUT--NOT LIKE THIS!
NOT LIKE THIS!
IMPORTANT NOTE: THERE'LL BE NO COP-OUT, WE PROMISE YOU! SPIDEY IS REALLY AWAKE! HE HAS SIX ARMS! AND OUR TALE WILL BE
CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE!

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Amazing Spider-Man 100 (1971), p. 28

others with power--others who tried! Yet they too were jeered, misunderstood, hated--and finally destroyed!"[10]

Marvel Comics sometimes indulge in allegory in addition to symbolism. On one occasion, for example, Spider-Man combats an allegorical, conceptual villain named D'Spayre, who almost defeats him; but Spider-Man rallies with the argument, "Man, it'd be so easy to give up. That's all spooky wants. Then they'd be no more pain . . . I mean, who said you had to win 'em all? But . . . if I lose to scum like you, D'Spayre--it's not because I've given up. It's because I'm dead!" After D'Spayre is vanquished, Dakihm the Sorcerer tells Spider-Man, "But so long as there is hope, it must be balanced . . . by despair. We can reduce him for a time. But while there is life itself, he will exist." However, it is another sorcerer, Dr. Strange, and not Spider-Man, who habitually combats allegorical villains. These are either embodiments of man's inner conflicts and neuroses or are representations of external, cosmological conceits; and they include such conceptual entities as Nightmare, Eternity and his two attributes, Order and Chaos, Death, the Devil and the "dark side" of one's own soul, and, most recently, Fear, the Dweller in the Darkness.[11]

After a recent, draining encounter with one of Fear's emissaries, Dr. Strange "turns towards the window, staring at the gathering fog that obscures his view less than the fear which clouds his heart. [. . .] The thick fog closes over the ancient castle . . . and remains oppressively evident for much of the following day." The fog closing in on the castle is an example of the pathetic fallacy--the use of which is particularly appropriate in such gothic circumstances--as it represents

the nebulous fear enveloping the sorcerer. An even clearer instance of the use of figures of speech, however, is the use of the word "cloud," which is here a submerged metaphor descriptive of the effect this fear has on Dr. Strange's "heart," itself an instance of synecdoche. And metaphor, as it is in literature generally, is the most frequently encountered figure of speech in Marvel Comics, where it is often used in conjunction with personification as well as with the pathetic fallacy, as in a scene in a recent Marvel Two-In-One in which an auto swerves "into an innocent fire hydrant that quickly spouts its watery indignation."[12]

Often in Marvel Comics the metaphors will be hackneyed or commonplace, almost unconscious reflexes of the narrative, as when a burglar "glides like smoke down several flights of stairs" or "the evening shadows creep through the narrow side streets of the lower east side. Here and there patches of streetlamp illumination dance gingerly on side walks caked with grime." Such examples occur by the thousands, but sometimes the metaphors are fresh and purposeful. In the current Fantastic Four plot, an already effective metaphor that the Sphinx employs to describe both his immortality and his equally burdensome exile from Egypt is enhanced by the graphics. The Sphinx recalls, "How long I trudged through the torrid

"HOW LONG I TRUDGED THRU THIS TORRID DESERT I STILL DO NOT KNOW. DAYS, MONTHS, YEARS RAN TOGETHER LIKE THIS ENDLESS BURNING SANDS BENEATH MY NAKED FEET...

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Fantastic Four 212 (1979), p. 15

desert I still do not know. Days, months, years ran together like the endless burning sands beneath my naked feet . . ." And in an issue of Amazing Spider-Man the following, rather complex extended metaphor is used to describe Peter Parker's recovery from a blow to the skull: "Consciousness comes back slowly, fading in like the picture on a television tube; sound first, then light and color afterwards. And when the picture has completely assembled itself . . . Peter discovers he's viewing a nightmare!"[13]

In the most recent issue of Marvel Spotlight, Captain Marvel maneuvers a small spacecraft in a deep space dog-fight with a larger, attacking ship: "The result is a dazzling display of pyrotechnical speed and skill, as the tiny craft comes 'alive' . . . an agile David never once doubting the vulnerability of this awesome Goliath."[14] While the metaphors and use of personification here are better than most of the near-cliches that often occur in Marvel's prose, the dependence on a Biblical allusion in constructing the central metaphor is more interesting still. Marvel's extensive reliance on allusion is more premeditated and artistic than is its even more extensive though less even use of metaphor. And this use of allusion--which includes reference to historical figures and events, to Gothic, science fiction, and fantasy literature, to literary classics, to classical mythology and the mythology of the Norse and Hindu gods, to folk legends, and to popular culture itself, as well as to the Bible, which often identifies itself as an allusion, and which is also conveyed through graphics as well as through narrative--is probably the most pedagogically useful, and is almost the most frequent, narrative technique employed in these comics.

That the Sphinx was once the chief wizard of Rameses II and as such was disgraced and exiled when he was bested in sorcery by Moses entails both Biblical and historical allusion. Among Marvel's many historical allusions to Greek and Roman antiquity is the advice the treacherous Prince Shaitan of Spartak, a rocky, barren world, gives to his brother, Acroyear, in a recent issue of Micronauts: "That life is to be valued less than glory--that we should enter battle prepared to return bearing our shields, or carried dead upon them." A Marvel villain named the Hatemonger bears a striking physical resemblance to Adolph Hitler. And the appearance of Marie LaVeau in recent issues of Marvel Team-Up is but a more obscure historical allusion, as a practitioner of voodoo named Marie LaVeau actually was known earlier this century as the witch queen of New Orleans.[15]

Of course, that Marie LaVeau greets Dr. Strange "with the words Dracula used to welcome Jonathan Harker" is another, a literary allusion as well as an instance of foreshadowing. A friend of hers greets the Spider-Woman, although in a more lighthearted context, with the same words, "Enter freely and of your own will," in a recent Spider-Woman episode; and again the allusion is identified, this time by author. In another clear nod to the gothic, "the Red Death himself" appears in a Dr. Strange episode along with a cited passage describing him and correctly attributed to Poe. There are several references to The Wizard of Oz in the current Fantastic Four story: Galactus dispatches the super-hero group to some remote quadrant of the universe to run an errand for him before he will agree to defeat the Sphinx for them; and

the Thing calls attention to this plot similarity to Baum's fantasy in first remarking "I've a feelin' we ain't in Kansas anymore" when the four of them first materialize at their otherworldly destination and again when he tells Galactus, "Awright, Hotshot, we did it. We brought ya the broomstick a' the Wicked Witch of the West," after they successfully return with the object of their quest. And the writers at Marvel also frequently allude to Alice in Wonderland: a hookah-smoking caterpillar is among the inhabitants of Dr. Strange's crystal orb, and Spider-Man thinks to himself "curiouser and curiouser, as a girl named Alice once said" while he seeks out clues in unravelling a mystery.[16]

On the same page as this allusion to Lewis Carroll's novel, Spider-Man somewhat offhandedly quotes The Merchant of Venice in guessing that the New York Police Commissioner "will have his pound of flesh" from two policeman who fail to capture him. Of course, in lamenting that he has "become a character in a tale by Kafka" when he grows his two extra sets of arms, Spider-Man engages in yet another literary allusion--but one

"SHE WAITED UNTIL HE DROPPED HIS GUARD, AND THEN CAST A SPELL OF TRANSFERENCE THAT RETURNED ME TO EARTH--
"--WHILE TRAPPING HIM FOREVER WITHIN THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO!
OOOOOHHH...
HEY, DOC--LONG TIME NO SEE.
OL' BUDDY, LOOKS T'ME LIKE YOU JUST GOT CAUGHT WITH YOUR AURA DOWN, KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
THE--CATERPILLAR...?
HOSTS OF HOGGOTH--I'M IN THE ORB!

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Marvel Team-Up 77 (1979), p. 11

that is somewhat obscured, as the writers expect the reader to associate their hero's metamorphosis and Gregor Samsa's without specifically mentioning either it or him. An even more inverse allusion occurs in a more recent issue of Amazing Spider-Man; when Spider-Man encounters an unexpectedly returned foe and notes, "You're dead . . . or at least you're supposed to be," the villain answers rhetorically, "Must I repeat Samuel Clemens' oft-quoted line," but he refrains from actually saying, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." Allusions are fairly common in Amazing Spider-Man. When Peter tells a friend that he works for the insufferable J. Jonah Jameson, the friend commiserates, "You're a better man than I am, Peter Parker." And Mary Jane concludes an episode in which she decides to put off thinking things through for awhile by saying, "Yeah. Like Scarlett O'Hara said . . . Tomorrow is another day!" About as often as not, as in this and previously mentioned instances, strictly literary allusions are identified as such as well as merely made. As additional examples, on the occasion of her return to Cape Canaveral, where she had once worked as security officer, Ms. Marvel thinks, "I guess like Thomas Wolfe said, 'You can't go home again.'" And when an impish character named Sprite is introduced in The Eternals, an Eternal informs a human character that "One of your writers, named Shakespeare, included Sprite in one of his plays."[17]

However, almost all of the other characters in The Eternals are transmutations of characters from Greek mythology: Ajak, a warrior; Ikaris, who possesses the power of levitation; Makarri, who has a mania for fast vehicles (and whom we are told was known as Hermes by the Greeks);

Zuras, eldest of the Eternals; Thena, his daughter; and Sersi, who reminisces, "I can still recall my villa on one of the ancient Greek islands, where I was visited by a sailor called Ulysses, and his ravenous crew of slobs [. . .] The Greek storytellers never could spell my name right! However, I did change those boors into pigs." Other allusions to Greek mythology as well as history abound in Marvel Comics. To combat a criminal who hypnotizes his victims with the sound of disco music, Spider-Man decides to "borrow a trick from Ulysses--and stuff balled-up webbing into my ears to cut out the sound!" Jim Wilson, a friend of the Hulk's, thinks, "You just let the Trojan Horse thru the gates" when a guard allows him inside a military base from which he intends to free an imprisoned Hulk. Jim had been tricked into freeing his big, green friend by Hydra, traditional nemisis of Nick Fury and a criminal organization whose motto is "Hail Hydra! Immortal Hydra! We shall never be destroyed! Cut off a limb--and two more shall take its place." And in an early Avengers episode, Hercules is deceived into thinking he must fight "The many-headed Hydra! That most fearsome of ancient beasts--whose heads do grow anew as fast as they are destroyed." A footnote explains, "Sure, that's where we got the idea for Nick Fury's perennial sparring partners in Strange Tales! You think we make up all these nutty names ourselves?" The folks at Marvel have aptly and rather playfully chosen to name another character, Ultron's robot bride, Jocasta, because Ultron, another robot, who hates and seeks to destroy his creator/father, Hank Pym, but who loves Hank's wife, whose life force Ultron once attempts to drain into Jocasta's platinum chassis, has an overwhelming Oedipus complex. And the current villain in the X-Men is Proteus, a mutant who

THEN, AS THE VERY FLOOR BENEATH HIM SEEMS TO TURN TO STONY CRAGS--AS A LONG-FORGOTTEN ROAR ECHOES THRU THE STYGIAN BLACKNESS--HERCULES TURNS TO BEHOLD--
RRAAHHRRGGG!
THE MANY-HEADED HYDRA!
THAT MOST FEARSOME OF ANCIENT BEASTS --WHOSE HEADS DO GROW ANEW AS FAST AS THEY ARE DESTROYED!"
"I SURE, THAT'S WHERE WE GOT THE IDEA FOR NICK FURY'S PERENNIAL SPARRING-PARTNERS IN STRANGE TALES! YOU THINK WE MAKE UP ALL THESE NUTTY NAMES OURSELVES?-- STRAIGHT-FORWARD STAN.

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Avengers 43 (1967), p. 23

has no form of his own (and is thus difficult to capture) but who does have the power to alter the form of everything else that exists.[18]

In the latest Thor Annual, Thor is transported back in time and out of his normal mythological element when he returns to the scene of the Trojan War, encounters Aeneas, Priam, Helen, Menelaus, Paris, Odysseus, Achilles, Agamemnon, Diomedes, Cassandra, Pandarus, and the entire Pantheon of Greek gods, and observes the fall of Troy. However, Thor's customary setting is Asgard, his usual companions are the likes of Odin, Loki, Balder, and Heimdall, and he has adventures involving frost giants, assorted trolls, and the Midgard Serpent, among many other creatures from Norse mythology. In a recent Thor plot, the story of the twilight of the gods, Ragnarok, is repeated in meticulous detail--but it turns out to be a false alarm. And in another recent issue, some of Thor's friends battle a dragon named Fafnir; but the Norn-Queen notes to Odin that this Fafnir is "the second to bear that name: not the gold-guarding storm-giant of legend, but the king named after that giant, whom Thor didst turn likewise into a dragon in a moment of rare good humor."[19]

Marvel's writers do not rely solely on Greek and Norse mythology, however. In a recent Marvel Team-Up Annual the villains are reincarnations of "myths torn from Hindu Mythology [. . .] Brahma. Shiva, The Destroyer. Vishnu, Preserver. Ratri, The Night. Mara, The Dreamer, and Yama, Death-God. Kali, The Black Madness. And Agni, Lord of Fire." A recent Hulk episode takes place in El Dorado, and the writers note that "the famous English courtier, Sir Walter Raleigh, almost stumbled across it during his tours of the new world . . . In 1759, Voltaire used it as a setting in his classic work, Candide." In a much older issue of the Hulk,

IN FACT, IN MINE OWN SMALL WAY, I HAVE MADE CERTAIN OF IT.
UNHOLY DEVIL! ART THOU RESPONSIBLE-- FOR YONDER NIGHTMARE??
LORD ZEUS DID PROMISE ME ... THAT THE GREEKS WOULD REFRAIN FROM FURTHER ACTS OF WAR-- BUT THOU VILE LOKI--
DID MAKE NO VOW, TO EITHER MAN OR IMMORTAL.
I MERELY GAVE A BIT OF ADVICE THUNDER GOD, TO ... ARGIVE PRINCE I ... TO MEET...
... A MAN AFTER MINE OWN HEART, BY NAME ODYSSEUS.
"THE GREEKS THEN CONSTRUCTED AN IMMENSE WOODEN HORSE, WHICH THEY GAVE OUT WAS INTENDED AS A PROPITIATORY OFFERING TO ATHENA... BUT WAS IN FACT FILLED WITH ARMED MEN.
"THE REMAINING GREEKS THEN SAILED AWAY.
WE CALL THAT WHICH WE DID JOINTLY CREATE--
--THE WOODEN HORSE!
"IN THE NIGHT, THE HIDDEN MEN DID OPEN THE GATES TO THE GREEKS. THE CITY WAS SET ON FIRE... ITS PEOPLE, OVERCOME WITH FEASTING AND SLEEP, PUT TO THE SWORD... AND TROY COMPLETELY DESTROYED."
--PARAPHRASED FROM BULFINCH'S MYTHOLOGY, 1855.
"THUS ENDETH THE SAGA OF TROY. BUT THE UNTOLD SAGA OF AENEAS, AND OF THE TRUE FOUNDING OF ROME, SHALL BE TOLD WHEN NEXT WE MEET, A YEAR HENCE.
--ROY THOMAS.
-Fin-

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Thor Annual 8 (1979), p. 46

the Jewish folktale of the Golem is recapitulated. And the latest Micronauts episode concerns a situation that is clearly based on the legend of Robin Hood.[20]

In fact, the entire Micronauts series bears in its characterizations a striking similarity to Star Wars, which is itself completely derivative--ironically, Micronauts' Baron Karza is a replication of Star Wars' Darth Vader, who is in turn an obvious copy of Marvel's own original Dr. Doom--and the first Micronauts' story-line borrows its pivotal plot twist from Alfred Bester's The Stars My Destination, a science fiction classic that lifts most of its plot and characters from The Count of Monte Cristo. Not surprisingly, the single most often used source of allusions in Marvel Comics is popular culture itself: primarily science fiction, film, other comics, and television. When the Falcon contracts laryngitis from a villain called the Silencer, he notes that the effect is a case of "instant Harpo Marx." The entire plot of an old Spider-Man story in which the Daily Bugle, in the hopes of boosting circulation, mounts an expedition to a sub-tropical area of Antarctica to investigate reports of a giant lizard is loosely based on King Kong. Gwen Stacy, who is kidnapped by the reptile, is cast as Fay Wray, while Spider-Man once refers to the giant lizard, who gets to battle a variety of prehistoric creatures also, as "King Kong" to make sure that the reader does not miss the element of parody in this adventure. And clear allusions to Casablanca occur both when Peter Parker tells an old enemy who has just unexpectedly allowed him to stay at his apartment, "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship," and when an incidental character in the latest Marvel Two-in-One says, "Here's lookin' at you, sweetheart" as he throws a punch at a gangster.[21]

JUST THEN, FROM ASTONISHINGLY FAR-OFF, PETE HEARS...
YOU MAY CEASE THOSE INCOHERENT GRUNTINGS, GOG--AND YOU, YOUNG LADY, YOUR SCREAMS.
BOTH THE SAVAGES--AND THE INTRUDERS--HAVE BEEN LEFT FAR BEHIND.
YOUR FRIEND IS HERE NOW, GOG--

Amazing Spider-Man 103 (1971), p. 15

BLIND IS HE EVER NOT ON THAT TRAIL--!
SOMEHOW ---THIS ISN'T GOING ACCORDING TO OUR PLAN.
BY NOW, I WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE SHAKEN KING KONG--AND DOUBLED BACK TO HELP RESCUE GWEN--

Amazing Spider-Man 104 (1971), p. 11

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Earlier in this issue of Marvel Two-in-One, which also includes a few references to the Lone Ranger, when two criminals note that "Bullets . . . just bounce right off'a him," the Thing observes, "I'm just like that fella in the movies--'cept that I don't wear a cornball cape." However, it is more often Spider-Man who alludes to Superman--and usually to the comic book and not the more recent film version of that hero. While changing into his costume on a wintry day, for example, Spider-Man complains, "Where are all those cozy phone booths when a guy really needs 'em?" While bursting out of some heavy metal chains bound around his chest, Spider-Man shouts, "This looks like a job for Spider-Man!" and then reflects, "Gee--that's not a bad line." And while he extricates himself from a steel girder a villain had entwined around him, Spider-Man jokes, "You could say I can bend steel in my bare hands . . . but I think that's copy-righted by someone else." Amazing Spider-Man, originally conceived as a parody of the Dective Comics magazines, also comically alludes to Batman. For awhile, Spider-Man gets around New York in a truly hideous spider-mobile, and on one occasion he regrets that he doesn't "have a cave or anything to hide this junkpile in." Later, when he corners an enemy in a cave, he asks, "Is this where Adam West and Burt Ward used to hang out?"[22]

Finally, just as they employ graphics to establish or to reinforce some of their uses of symbolism and metaphor, Marvel Comics also sometimes experiment with graphic allusions. For instance, when the Hulk lurches towards a young girl who, in a setting of pastoral innocence, is obliviously dipping her finger in a pond, the panel suggests irresistably a memorable scene from Karloff's original Frankenstein movie. When Spider-Man

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Hulk 133
(1970), p. 31

becomes involved in a Martian invasion of Earth during an adventure in the future, the lumbering, tripodal war machines from which the Martians fire their death rays come straight out of Wells' War of The Worlds. And when one of the giant robots of Shogun Warriors is captured in the latest issue by alien spacemen on the moon, who tie him down with cables and stakes, the illustration clearly evokes Swift's description of Gulliver captured by the Lilliputians.[23]

The original article from which I extracted this essay is 85 pages long, essentially because it contains many more examples and goes much more deeply into Marvel's use of plot devices, which can only be discussed at great length, and techniques of characterization, such as the use of doubles and foils. Even so, all observations and examples in both this and the longer article are but a fraction of the incidents of use of pedagogically sound narrative techniques that I happened to notice in an almost casual reading of the comics I've seen in the past few months.

YOU STAND IN THE PATH OF BOTH THE MARTIANS AND MYSELF, FRIEND-- CAUGHT BEFORE THE BLASTER AND THE BEAST!
...YET, I SENSE THAT YOU'RE A MAN BENEATH THAT COSTUME-- NOT A STINKING MARTIAN-MUTATE-- SO I'LL NOT RIDE YOU DOWN!
SKREEE
WILL YOU STAND WITH ME-- HELP ME TURN THE DEVILS?
WILL YOU FIGHT BESIDE KILLRAVEN!!?
IT TAKES PRECISELY ONE-TENTH OF A SECOND FOR SPIDEY TO FIGURE OUT HIS ANSWER--HIS EYES GOING FROM THE FIGURE ON THE FROTHING SERPENT-STALLION TO THE GLEAMING DEATH-MACHINES THAT STALK HIM...

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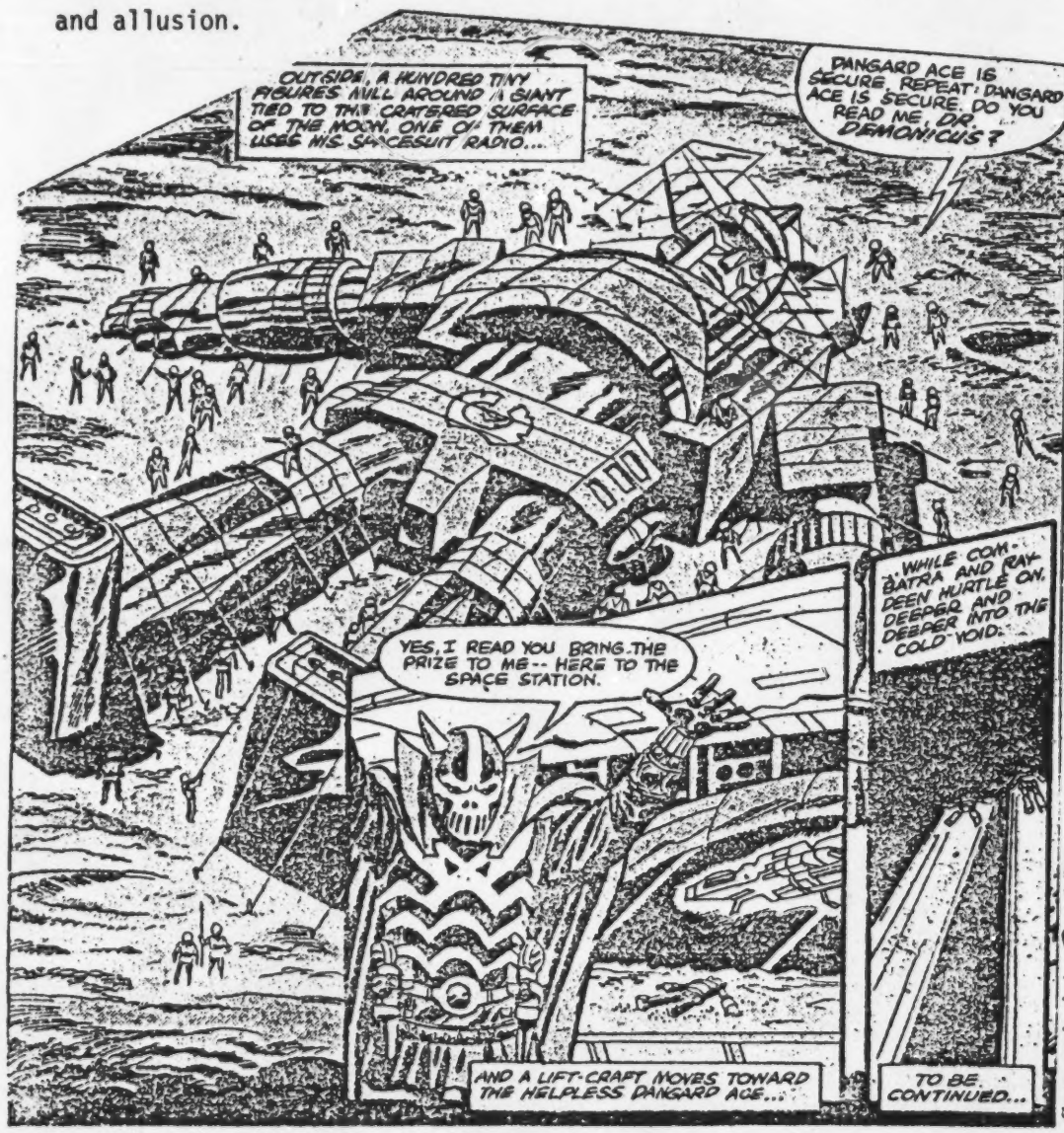
Marvel Team-Up 45 (1976), p. 6

Any single Marvel comic picked up off the newstands--comics that are now already being read by one out of three American teenagers anyway--will likely contain similar, clear, teachable examples of most of these same narrative elements: synopsis, dramatic fiction, exposition, flashback, foreshadowing, climax, resolution, double, foil, character development, irony, symbolism, allegory, metaphor, pathetic fallacy, personification, and allusion.


OUTSIDE, A HUNDRED TINY FIGURES MILL AROUND A GIANT TIED TO THE CRATERED SURFACE OF THE MOON. ONE OF THEM USES HIS SPACESUIT RADIO...
DANGARD ACE IS SECURE. REPEAT: DANGARD ACE IS SECURE. DO YOU READ ME, DR. DEMONICUS?
YES, I READ YOU. BRING THE PRIZE TO ME -- HERE TO THE SPACE STATION.
WHILE COMBATRA AND RAYDEEN HURTLE ON, DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE COLD VOID.
AND A LIFT-CRAFT MOVES TOWARD THE HELPLESS DANGARD ACE...
TO BE CONTINUED...

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Shogun Warriors 12 (1979), p. 31

Notes

[1]Amazing Spider-Man (hereafter abbreviated as ASM) 69 (1969), pp. 1-2.

[2]Fantastic Four (hereafter abbreviated as FF) 212 (1979), pp. 1-3; Micronauts Annual 1 (1979).

[3]FF 212 (1979).

[4]FF 212 (1979), pp. 1, 2, 17; FF 213 (1979) pp. 22-23.

[5]Marvel Team-Up (hereafter abbreviated as MTU) 76 (1978), pp. 1, 2, 23; MTU 77 (1979), p. 31; MTU 80, p. 15; Defenders 66-69 (1978-79); Avengers 167-77 (1977).

[6]FF 213 (1979); MTU 74 (1978), p. 10; ASM 140 (1974), p. 16.

[7]ASM 24 (1965), p. 8; ASM 54 (1967), pp. 18, 19; ASM 114 (1972), pp. 28-29; ASM 130 (1973), p. 31.

[8]Amazing Fantasy 15 (1962), recapitulated with some variation in ASM 94 (1970) and ASM 181 (1978); ASM 94 (1970), p. 10.

[9]ASM 181 (1978), p. 30; MTU 84 (1979), p. 14; ASM 30 (1965), p. 20; ASM 122 (1973), p. 10; ASM 136 (1974) pp. 2, 3.

[10]ASM 149 (1975), pp. 18, 22-23; ASM 101 (1971), p. 2; ASM 100 (1971), pp. 28, 27.

[11]MTU 68 (1978), pp. 27, 30; Dr. Strange 1-38 (1974-79).

[12]Dr. Strange 37 (1979), p. 31; MTU 59 (1979), p. 3.

[13]Machine Man 11 (1979), p. 2; Machine Man 12 (1979), p. 1; FF 212 (1979), p. 15; ASM 139 (1974), p. 31.

[14]Marvel Spotlight 3 (1979), p. 17.

[15]FF 212 (1979), p. 15; Micronauts 12 (1979), p. 23; MTU 76-77 (1978-79).

[16]MTU 76 (1978), p. 23; Spider-Woman 19 (1979), p. 14; Dr. Strange 11 (1975), p. 26; FF 211 (1979), p. 1, 17; MTU 77 (1979), p. 11; ASM 132 (1974), p. 3.

[17]ASM 132 (1974), p. 3; ASM 101 (1971), p. 2; ASM 197 (1979), p. 2; ASM 185 (1978), p. 27; ASM 131 (1974), p. 31; Ms. Marvel 11 (1977), p. 14; Eternals 10 (1976), p. 17.

[18]Eternals 1-19 (1976-78); Eternals 4 (1976), p. 15; Spectacular Spider-Man 24 (1978), p. 22; Hulk 132 (1970), pp. 19, 14; Avengers 43 (1967), p. 23; X-Men 125-28 (1979).

[19]Thor Annual 8 (1979); Thor 288 (1979), p. 14.

[20]MTU Annual 1 (1976), p. 37; Hulk 240 (1979), p. 1; Hulk 134 (1970), p. 3; Micronauts 13 (1979).

[21]Micronauts 1-11 (1979); Marvel Premiere 49 (1979), p. 22; ASM 103 (1971), p. 15; ASM 104 (1971), p. 15; ASM 138 (1974), p. 10; Marvel Two-in-One 59 (1979), p. 27.

[22]Marvel Two-in-One 59 (1979), p. 23; Spectacular Spider-Man 4 (1977), p. 16; ASM 162 (1976), p. 23; ASM King-Size Annual 13 (1979), p. 25; ASM 130 (1973), p. 27; MTU Annual 2 (1979), p. 37.

[23]Hulk 133 (1970), p. 31; MTU 45 (1976), p. 6; Shogun Warriors 12 (1979), p. 31.